

Evaluate the contribution of one multi agency initiative and critically discuss the challenges of partnership working

Multi agency working what is it? Why is it important? And what does it mean? Knowles (2009), "The idea that the well – being of children and young people is a matter for the whole system". This assignment will define multi agency working, exploring the variety of different statutory and voluntary agencies working with children and young people and the challenges these agencies face. The author will discuss the barriers and challenges different professional people working within education are dealt with and the role, responsibilities and duties they play on a daily basis. In depth the author will evaluate the contribution of one multi agency initiative specifically and critically discuss the challenges faced by them through multi agency working. Gathering research on what policies such as Every Child Matters have contributed in helping multi agency develop and succeed. Concluding whose responsibility, it is to make sure that these barriers are overcome, ensuring every child, young person and their families receive all the support, help and advice offered from each agency which is made available to them.

Glenny and Roaf (2008), "For children's services to function effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people, collaboration has indeed come to be regarded as essential." What does multi agency work actually mean? Effective joint working and sharing of information and resources between a variety of different agencies to help support a child, young person and their families fulfil their needs, improve life outcomes and meet their aims. Each agency has a duty to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. These agencies have a duty to prevent children from harm and neglect before it may happen, early intervention is key. There are many different agencies including volunteer services, who depend on funding to offer their services and statutory agencies, who are employed by the local education authority that may work with children, young people and their families. These agencies may not necessarily just work within the school setting but may make home visits, day centres, youth groups and some might arrange to meet at a central point such as a café or a park. Some of the volunteer agencies that may come into schools are, school councillors known as Area 43 in Carmarthenshire, Barnardo's, SNAP Cymru and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services also known as CAMHS for short. Statutory agencies that may have regular set days working in schools or visit children in schools could be the school

nurse, education welfare officer, speech and language therapist, educational psychiatrist, young carers, social worker and youth worker. Multi agency may also be referred to as multi professional, joint working, multi-disciplinary or partnership working. When there are one or two agencies working together this is known as inter agency, three or more agencies working together is known as multi agency. According to Every Child Matters article (2005), they state that it is possible to group multi agency work into three separate models, multi-agency panel, multi-agency team and integrated service. An example of a professional working as part of a multi-agency panel would be Youth Inclusion and Support panel, they will meet regularly to discuss the benefits of multi-agency input for certain children. A multi-agency team will usually have a team leader who will recruit other organisations into the team, the team will often work on a larger scale rather than just with one child for example organisations such as, Behaviour and Education support and Youth offending team will usually work with a small group of children or take a whole school approach. Intergrated services will often be found at the heart of the community sometimes at the local primary school or family centre, Sure start for example will offer advice to parents on money, childcare, parenting, health and some centres offer early education to pre-schoolers (Welsh Government 2003).

Why is the value of multi-agency work so important? Knowles (2009), "Partnership working provides opportunities for needs to be met collectively as well as individually so that the needs of whole families can be addressed in a unified way". Many children will always require additional help from agencies such as the ones mentioned above due to the disadvantages they face from birth such as low-income households, unemployment, poverty, parents or carers have bad health, drug and alcohol misuse, one parent may be in prison, poor housing or overcrowding. Each agency has their own unique service to offer but all have a shared purpose that is why effective joint working between agencies and early interventions are important. Before a child is born the mother depending on her circumstances may already have agencies supporting her during pregnancy. Working with these agencies by identifying their needs and putting interventions in place children and young people are given an opportunity to take control, supporting them to live a happy life, give them the best possible outcomes in life and being a valued member of a community. Interventions such as Sure start and Flying start have proven successful in helping families with health and child care unfortunately though not always targeting the correct people who would benefit from the service. Such agencies will help the child succeed in education and gain qualifications in

hope to go on and have a successful career. School is not for everyone and appointed agencies may be able to source other options such as an apprentice course in college, Princes trust, youth access, seek employment or work experience at different settings. Listening to the child and their families is what is most important and any discussion on the child's future should begin here, agencies have to be non – judgmental, realistic and open to suggestions. Parents and carers should be involved in the decision making of their child's future. The child and his or her family should always be welcomed and made to feel valued and just as important as any agency working with them. A key worker should be allocated to a family who are supported by more than one agency, this allows the family to have one point of contact rather than having to speak to several different people (Barnardo's, 2001). The key worker is responsible for establishing a good working relationship with the family in order for them to trust that the agencies and their services are there to help. The key worker should be realistic, committed, offer guidance, supportive, motivated, good listener, reliable, easy to contact, approachable and have empathy (Barnardo's, 2001).

Glenny and Roaf (2008), "It often involves bringing together people with different views, all of whom believe their view and 'way' is right". Regardless to how true this reference may be each agency should have one common goal and that is to provide the best possible outcomes for the child. Effective joint working can be a challenge when you have more than one agency trying to get together, there will be barriers to overcome. Such barriers could include past or existing relationships between families and agencies, for example a family who have a bad relationship with a social worker that might have betrayed their trust or let them down won't be too eager to allow other services in to help or to attend meetings where these people will be. Confidentiality is important and families who put their trust in such agencies can be made to feel betrayed and let down when information is shared. Communication and language skills can play a critical part in why a family may not want to meet with agencies. For example, a father who cannot read may feel out of his depth, embarrassed and ashamed when agencies come together and not really understand the conversation and the decisions made, he may choose not to turn up to a meeting because of these reasons. Despite his untold reasons, judgmental agencies will possibly portray the father to be a bad parent who doesn't really care about the welfare of his children. Knowles (2009) "Many settings and schools are still guilty of sending home information that presupposes those receiving it can read, can read the information in the language it is written in and understand the terminology being used." There can often be conflict and tension when

a multi-agency meeting takes place due to the ego of some professionals and their willingness to work with others. Power issues and the lack of respect and equality can become apparent when one professional may think they are better than the others. Some may think they are more knowledgeable and believe the way they are doing things is correct and disagree how other agencies operate and will ignore the advice and suggestions of what others can contribute. Glenny and Roaf (2008), "Easy to lose sight of the child, the family and community in the struggle to maintain power, influence, control and dominance".

Occasionally professionals may be territorial over their services, facilities and resources and are reluctant to share with others. Time constraints and prioritizing play a huge part in getting everyone together, organising a multi-agency meeting to suit everyone's diary can be a challenge in itself. What may seem as a major emergency case to one agency might be a small matter to other agencies. Time management for travelling is key especially when you have to attend a multi-agency meeting which may be out of your geographical area. Making the time to meet with other agencies can prove almost impossible when some professionals are constantly battling with not enough hours in the day as it is. Other factors that influence multi agency work are budgets and funding which can make meetings difficult especially when there is a conflict between agencies over funding and who should have the money. Also, tension and bad feeling when different professionals are on different salaries, causing jealousy and inter agency mistrust. Commitment is key for effective multi-agency work and unfortunately there may be times when not everyone is as dedicated or committed as others which can lead to other professionals being frustrated or angry.

After the tragic death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 who's short life of suffering by the people who were meant to love and protect her the government recognised a huge change was needed in order to safeguard children and improve information sharing and interaction between agencies. Despite several agencies working with Victoria at the time before her death not one of them acted on the warning signs or shared any information with each other. If early interventions had been put in place Victoria's death might have been prevented. In March 2005 the government appointed a children's commissioner for the first time in history children were given a voice in the house parliament. Following the agenda from Every Child Matters (2003) the government stated that more needed to be done to safeguard each child and to ensure that they all fulfil their potential. As a result, it meant any agency working with a child, providing a service statutory or volunteer had to share their information with all agencies involved and that information was made more easily accessible. Every local

authority must have a list called the Information hub, of all the children in their area who have had additional support from any agencies (Every Child Matters, 2003). They stated that each child should be given the support to stay healthy, be safe, achieve economically, contribute to society positively and enjoy life. This was a major step forward for information sharing, easy access in cases of emergency to information and most of all in safeguarding children.

Area 43 are an independent charity founded in 1996, they offer a counselling service to children and young people aged between ten and twenty-five years old (Area 43, 2015). Their main office is based in Cardigan but they offer their services across Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire. They are a volunteer organisation who depend on funding to provide their services. Certain councillors are allocated specific days to work within a school setting where children are given an hour slot appointment to see the councillor. Most children are allocated a six-week course but it is up to the councillors discretion if they feel they need to keep seeing them for a shorter or longer period. There are many great benefits to the councillors visiting children at the school such as appointments are done during school time, this eliminates any travelling or transport issues the parents or carers may have. Children from year six will visit the councillor they are seeing in the secondary school they will eventually be going to, creating a positive link before the child changes school and putting the child's mind to rest of any worry to where the councillor will be when they move up to comprehensive. The councillor will often introduce the child to the schools' inclusion officer before leaving after their appointment, again creating a positive link for the child and the school. Small gestures like these can help reduce the stress of the child when they do change school and help them settle quicker. Appointments are made to work around the children for example the councillors will avoid booking appointments during core subjects such as English or Maths, or if they child specifically enjoys a subject such as physical education they will try not to make an appointment for that hour. The child visits the same councillor every week enabling them to form a bond and a sense of trust. Area 43 have an open-door policy, allowing the children to re visit or go back on the waiting list if they feel the need to. Everything is confidential and between the child and councillor unless the matter discussed is a child protection matter in which case will be reported to the child protection officer to deal with accordingly. The councillor will discuss this with the child and will explain why the information has to be passed on. Area 43 are able to make referrals to other services such as CAMHS, school nurse, social services and the police. Unfortunately, like anything there is a

waiting list but most children are seen within a month and sometimes sooner in an emergency. There are an overwhelming number of children now seeing councillors and the author believes that in the school setting she works at Area 43 deliver a great professional service and contribute to the well-being and happiness of so many children. Area 43 (2015) found that children were feeling less worried, more supported and better equipped to cope with various issues at school or home after speaking to one of their councillors.

One of the major barriers Area 43 have to contend with are school holidays, when councillors are unable to meet with the children. Many children depend on their school councillor and look forward to seeing them as it is an opportunity to unload their troubles, during school holidays they might not have anyone to unload too and this can be a worrying time for both parties. Nuisance parents or carers are another challenge they may face, as stated everything between the councillor and child is confidential but not all parents will accept that and deem it their right to know what has been said during their appointment. Parents may turn up at the school demanding to speak to the councillor or repeatedly phone the school in order to make contact. Sometimes children are deliberately kept at home in order to miss their counselling appointment, this can be a frustrating time for the child and the councillor. In the event of an emergency, if a child for instance has revealed they are going to harm or kill someone a multi-agency crisis meeting has to be called and the correct agencies need to be notified immediately, schools child protection officer, police, social services and parents. This can be an agonising time for the councillor as he or she has to break all trust with the child, whilst the councillor is empathetic and understands the child better the other agencies might not be so understanding when difficult decisions have to be made. The councillor may feel the need on different occasions to make a referral to an agency such as CAMHS or school nurse, the councillor may think that additional support is needed for the child or young person he has spoken to that day. It can be frustrating for the councillor when the other agencies after one assessment or a couple of meetings disagree that the child needs the extra support. Another barrier Area 43 have to overcome is sometimes with the school the child is at. When a councillor feels that a child is not coping with so many lessons or a particular subject, for various reasons they may suggest that the child drops a subject to concentrate more on what they can do for the welfare of the child. The school may disagree with this which can lead to tension and bad feeling between staff members and the councillor. Despite different barriers Area 43 have to overcome they are always working with the child and want the best possible outcomes for them always.

After researching the work of multi agencies the author is happy to conclude that each agency has one goal and that is to help, support and guide that child and their families. There is always going to be the need for multi-agency work as the society we live in is forever changing and issues such as poverty are not improving. The government are making significant progress in helping multi agency work following Every child Matters (2003) agenda and implanting new strategies in communities such as Flying and Sure start. However, with constant budget cuts and less funding being made available who's to say how long these services will be on offer. Partnership working will always be complex and professionals will have to overcome these barriers forever. Different agencies are one piece of the jigsaw to increasing awareness and improving the best outcomes for children and their families, when they all come together the bigger picture can be seen, this is why despite the challenges agencies face in getting together it is crucial that they do and the information is shared. Each agency has their own personal unique way of helping but being committed and able to meet and discuss what other agencies can offer and contribute is vital.

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